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ABSTRACT

This document describes eight models of local and state special education efforts that are providing viable ways for parents to become more involved in their children's education. The models are designed to develop effective two-way communication and collaboration between parents and teachers, develop methods for parents to actively support their children's learning in partnership with the school staff, develop methods by which the educational staff may provide ongoing support for parents, develop methods for staff to involve parents in program improvement efforts, and develop an ongoing parent training program. The models include two preschool programs, one a district-wide program in Seattle, Washington, and the second a building-level attempt in Southwick, Massachusetts. The next three models are district/state-wide programs that cover the entire kindergarten to grade 12 spectrum, in Nebraska, Connecticut, and San Diego (California). The sixth model describes a transitional program in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, to help students bridge the gap between the sheltered world of school to the less structured world of work. The seventh model is a parent-helping-parent program that extends across Minnesota and focuses upon the establishment of coalitions for providing more effective communication between parents, special needs children, and the school. The eighth model describes a parent communication network at the local school level in South Bend, Indiana. (Contains 20 references.) (JDD)

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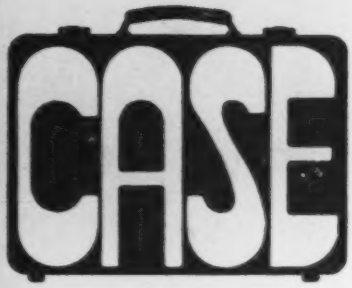

COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION, INCORPORATED

A DIVISION OF THE COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

CASE RESEARCH COMMITTEE

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INFORMATION DISSEMINATION PACKET

Parent Involvement In The Special Education Process:

A Synopsis of Exemplary Models

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Department of School Administration
Department of Special Education

1992

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Parent Involvement In The Special Education Process:

A Synopsis of Exemplary Models

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February 1990

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INTRODUCTION

The development of a document entitled Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education: A Reference Tool.* was the result of a concern shared by many special education representatives from the Regional Resource Center (RRC) regarding the lack of any consistent framework for examining the effectiveness of newly mandated state and federal special education services and programs. Members of the RRC felt that even though federal and state special education mandates had brought improvements to the quantity and adequacy of services for disabled students, the lack of an established focus for assessing programs would greatly hinder significant progress being made in the quality of special education programs.

Thus, the RRC initiated a collaborative effort involving professionals across the country for the purpose of providing a set of effectiveness indicators which could serve as a reference tool for programs pertaining to the education of students with disabilities. The indicators referred to in this packet are specific to the areas of parent participation and community and interagency involvement in special education programs outlined in the Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education. Some of the indicators addressed in the document prepared through the RRC effort include:

- the establishment of effective two-way communication and collaboration with parents and school staffs;

- the encouragment of parents to actively support their children's learning through the building of partnerships between home and school;

- the maintenance of on-going staff support for parents;

- the involvment of parents in on-going program improvement efforts and the providing of on-going training programs for parents;

*This document is available through:
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PHILOSOPHY/RATIONALE

Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education: A Reference Tool, is distributed by the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE). It directs attention to five main areas of evaluation for programs that are designed to develop and encourage parent participation in the special education process. These areas include:

1) the development of effective two-way communication and collaboration between parents and teachers;
2) the development of methods for parents to actively support their children's learning in partnership with the school staff;
3) the development of methods by which the educational staff may provide on-going support for parents;
4) the development of methods for staff to involve parents in program improvement efforts; and
5) the development of an on-going parent training program.

There are problems and challenges involved in meeting these effectiveness indicators. Too often an adversarial relationship has developed between parents and staff members because progress in many school programs (most recently those involving the education of disabled students), has been made as a result of parental pressure. The establishment of effective and positive communication between parents and school personnel is crucial to the optimal development of a program and of the children it serves. To this end, school districts across the country are dedicating their efforts toward the goal of building and maintaining a relationship within their school communities that fosters openness, honesty, and cooperation between parents and school personnel.

A review of the literature and a review of several special education programs that ranged across a wide spectrum in size and scope, showed the importance of positive, two-way communication between the home and school. Although each model approaches the question of communication in a way unique to local needs, many similarities surfaced among all programs. Most importantly, these programs embraced the philosophy that the participation of parents in the education of their children and cooperation among advocate groups were desirable outcomes for any educational program.

This report contains detailed descriptions of eight models for establishing parental involvement in the special education process. The first two are descriptions of models of pre-school programs. The first of these, in Seattle, Washington, is a district-wide program for a large metropolitan school system. The second describes a building-level attempt to establish a pre-school program for a small, but growing community which is undergoing the transition from a rural to a suburban setting.

The next three models are district/state-wide programs that cover the entire K-12 spectrum. The sixth model describes a transitional program that has been developed to help students bridge the gap between the sheltered world of school to the less structured world of work.

The seventh model is a parent-helping-parent program that extends across states and focuses upon the establishment of coalitions for providing more effective communication between parents, special needs children, and the school. Finally, the

eight model describes a parent communication network at the local school level, where parents provide input on meeting agendas, and aid in identifying needs and concerns within the community regarding any service or educational program being implemented within their district.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH METHODS

The material in this packet was obtained through:

1. A review of the literature related to special education/ regular education interface projects.

2. A review of individual state's rules and regulations relating to implementation of P.L. 94-142.

3. An ERIC search of government documents relating to the subject.

4. Personal telephone interviews with district and local state personnel in the seven sites outlined.

5. Inquiries to parent advocacy coalition groups concerned with the quality of education for students with disabilities.

PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

MODEL 1: SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Seattle Public Schools, through their Developmental Pre-School Program within their Student Support Services Division, has developed a two-volume home activity manual to provide teachers with a resource for involving parents of pre-school children. The manual bases the three separate levels of activities for disabled children on normal child development stages so that parents can see how these stages of development are addressed in each student's school program. The activities provide parents with some ideas of ways to work and play with their child. At each level, the activities become increasingly more challenging. The activities also emphasize self-esteem and self-help. In addition, each manual contains a supplement of information and activity sheets developed expressly for the visually and hearing impaired students as well as students with multiple disabilities.

Included in the manual are reproducible letters to parents describing activities for each week of the school year. (See examples.) Each sheet contains a space for parent comments to be returned to the teacher or counselor if the parent wishes to do so. Also included are periodic parent questionnaires. These one-page, ten question flyers are intended as a quick evaluation tool for determining program usefulness. The questions require only a checkmark to answer most items, but include as well a space for parental comments, suggestions, or questions.

Reproducible reminder sheets and request forms are included in each manual to save school personnel valuable time. Only a moment is needed for either the teacher or the parent to communicate with one another about any of the activities. The manual also includes a resource guide of summer activities offered in the Seattle area that are suitable for disabled children. There is also a list of community resources which may be useful to the parents of disabled children.

The objectives and goals of the home activity manual are: 1) increased parent-child interaction; 2) increased parent-teacher interaction; and 3) the education of parents in a non-threatening manner. The manual, entitled Home Helpers: A Home Activity System, was developed in 1984 through funds available under a Title VI Pre-School Incentive Grant award. The manual was used by 14 teachers in Seattle's pre-school and transitional kindergarten classrooms during the 1983-1984 piloting period. In the first full year of its implementation (1984-85), it was used by approximately 18 teachers and 300 parents in Seattle, as well as by over 25 school districts in Washington. Users of Home Helpers were asked to evaluate the manual in the spring of 1984 after the initial piloting period and again in January and May of 1985. Responses from users were favorable and paralleled the goals and objectives of the project. Data indicated that interactions between parent and child were increased over that of a control group.

In addition, the manual has been used as an explanatory guide for information that parents receive regarding programs for

disabled students. The manual states the general purpose of special education, explains the specific goals of special education programs, advises parents of their legal rights and responsibilities, and gives a detailed explanation of how the Individual Education Plan (IEP) would be written and how the placement process for special education is conducted. In this way, each parent has at least some notion of the purpose of special education programs before the initial parent/teacher conference.

The Seattle School District provides an in-district liaison who helps with counseling between parents and staff. The district maintains a book and tape lending library as well as organizes workshops on topics of concern to parents. In addition, a newsletter is published by the Special Education Department three times per year. This public relations effort attempts to keep approximately 4,500 parents of special education students informed of workshops, seminars and conferences. The newsletter, published in English, also contains a notice in eight languages that translations are available. This newsletter, Parents as Partners, is printed and distributed by students who are participating in vocational training in the printing graphics program at the high school level.

Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education suggests the establishment of a parent advisory board and this has been done in the Seattle district. Called SEAC, The Special Education Advisory Committee is a district committee comprised of parents from all grade levels, and representatives from the community.

Their task is to advise the district on issues that relate to special education. Some issues with which SEAC has been involved include the budget process, vocational education, sex education in special education, and the transportation of disabled students. Each year, SEAC and the Special Education Department jointly host a parent conference. The school district assumes the cost. To facilitate attendance, child care is provided free of charge.

Contact: Seattle Public Schools
Department of Student Support
815 4th Avenue North
Seattle, WA. 98109
Attn: Dan Peterson
Parent Involvement Specialist

HOME HELPERS

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As your child learns language from you, it's important to talk about what you are doing around the house, label things and use a variety of words. Give your child opportunities to respond--whether that be with a look, a wiggle, a gesture, or a question! Try one or two of these games this week, use lots of language and have fun!

☐ OBSTACLE COURSE

Make an obstacle course in the living room on a rainy day. Plan it with your child's needs in mind. Does your child move by crawling or rolling? Have him go under a table, roll over a pillow, crawl around a chair. Climbers can climb over a chair, step over a rope, go through the legs of a table with a sheet draped across for a tunnel. What other ways can he go? (Gross Motor)

☐ SCRIBBLERS

When children are first learning to use writing tools, give them ones that are easy to use. Fat pencils and crayons are easier to hold than thin pens. Markers (water-washable) move much easier on paper than crayons. Use very large pieces of paper (grocery bag cut open). Try one laid on the floor--it may be easier to write on while lyong on their tummies!
(Fine and Gross Motor Skills)

☐ TOUCHING TUB

Have a special "touching tub" available for your child. A box or plastic tub filled with an inch or two of cornmeal, flour, oatmeal, or sand can provide hours of pleasure, as well as very important sensory awareness. At times, provide cups, spoons, scoops, or else "hide" favorite small toys or blocks in the cornmeal to be found. Dump cornmeal into a plastic bag or coffee can for storage, or rotate the material every week for variety. (Tactile and Sensory Awareness)

☐ TOO BIG!

Cut a hole in top of a box (2"x2"). See what things will fit in the hole, what things won't. Talk about "too big," "just right," "smaller than the hole."
(Size Concepts)

(Tear Here)

COMMENTS

Write your comments and ideas below. Keep the sheet at left and send this part to the teacher. It's up to you!

● OBSTACLE COURSE

● SCRIBBLERS

● TOUCHING TUB

● TOO BIG!

NAME (OPTIONAL)

HOME HELPERS

LEVEL C
WEEK 3

Remember to keep your Home Helpers sheet out where you can see it and remember to use it. Have your child remind you too! And have fun!

☐ JUNIOR CHARADES

For a whole family game, make some cards with different actions on them. You might cut out pictures from a magazine, or just write the words. (Jump, hammer a nail, stand on one foot, etc.) Let your child help where he can. Let each person draw a card, reading the card to your child if necessary. Then have him act it out for the others to guess. If this is difficult, try it again in a week or so, and practice occasionally. (Language, Problem Solving)

☐ IT'S MARBLE-OUS

Lay a string or piece of yarn on the floor. Let your child lie down on her tummy or squat. Using marbles or pebbles about that size, see if she can roll the marble right up to the line without crossing it. She will have to be very careful not to cross over! Take turns and see how who comes closest!
(Motor Skills, Judging Distances)

☐ LIBRARY TIME

Children need lots of exposure to books at an early age. Use your own picture books or take your child to the public library (check the phone books for locations) and check out a few books to take home. Make a special library time daily and let your child choose a book "to read." At first, "read" the book by simply telling about the picture on each page. Later, add more details from the text. (Language, Quiet Activity)

☐ ME BOOK

Start a book all about your child. Write a title on each page: What I Look Like, I Like to Play, My Friends, My Pets, etc. Do a page a week and let your child draw, cut and paste pictures, etc. to demonstrate each page. (Self-Concept)

(Tear Here)

COMMENTS

Write your comments and ideas below. Keep the sheet at left and send this part to the teacher. It's up to you!

• JUNIOR CHARADES

• IT'S MARBLE-OUS

• LIBRARY TIME

• ME BOOK

NAME (OPTIONAL)

HOME HELPERS - PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name (Optional):_____ Date:_____

Using the Home Helpers sheets is an option--if you <u>are</u> using these, please help us by filling this questionnaire and returning it to school within two weeks. Your input will help make the Home Helpers as useful as possible. We appreciate your sharing your views with us!

1. Have you been getting the Home Helpers weekly? Yes ( ) No ( )

2. Were you able to do some of the activities with your child? Yes ( ) No ( )

3. Did the activities you did fit into your normal routine, or did you take extra time?

   Normal routine ( ) Extra time ( ) Both ( )

4. How helpful were the sheets for giving you new ideas?

   Not Helpful ——|——|——|——|—— Very Helpful

5. How do the activities fit your child's ability level?

   Too Hard ——|——|——|——|—— Too Easy
   Just Right

6. How does your child react to doing the activities?

   _____

   _____

7. How do you feel about doing the activities?

   _____

   _____

8. Are the "By the Way..." sheets helpful?

   YES ( ) NO ( ) SOMEWHAT ( )

9. Any other topics you would like to see a "By the Way..." sheet on?

   _____

   _____

10. Comments, questions, suggestions:

    _____

    _____

<u>PLEASE RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE WITHIN TWO WEEKS.</u>

By the way . . .

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ABOUT DISCIPLINE: AVOIDING PROBLEMS

Many problems and frustrations can be avoided by clear, honest communication and by planning. Transitions are often difficult times and can be made smoother by making your expectations clear, warning a child that a change is coming ("in a few minutes you'll need to put your toys away because it will be dinner time") and providing rituals. A ritual is a particular way of doing things and signals to the child that dinner, bedtime, or whatever will soon be here. A bedtime ritual might consist of pajamas, quiet play, story, and then bed.

Children can be prepared for situations that are new or uncomfortable. Before a new situation you can explain to your child 1) what activities will take place, 2) what the child will be expected or permitted to do and, 3) what she/he may feel like. For example, before attending a birthday party you may want to review or act out what happens at birthday parties 1) activities--take a present, sing Happy Birthday, play games, eat birthday cake; 2) expectations--you expect your child to participate in the activities, 3) feelings--she/he may feel shy, insecure or jealous.

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MODEL 2: WOODLAND SCHOOL, SOUTHWICK, MASSACHUSETTS

Through funds provided by a pre-school grant, the Woodland School in Southwick, Massachusetts has recently established parenting programs at the building level. Entitled The Responsive Parent Program, the ultimate goal of this project is to establish a parenting class. As the program now exists, pre-schoolers meet at the area high school four days per week and the parents of these children meet for one day per week. The class is composed of a mixed group, including students with moderate special needs and students who are considered to be normal in development. Parents of both special education and regular education students participate together during this eight week involvement program. However, if they so desire, they may schedule a one-to-one counselling session with school personnel.

Directed by the counselor, the Responsive Parent Program involves half-hour teaching sessions on such subjects as positive discipline, self-esteem, and sibling relationships. Each session is followed by a half-hour discussion period. This format tends to enhance more positive communication and has proven less intimidating for parents than more formal methods of instruction. Through The Reponsive Parent Program, parents are assisted in developing a better understanding of the disabilities that make learning difficult for their child. Parents are encouraged to observe their child's behavior on a comparative basis with other parents and to ask questions and compare notes with their child's counselor. An eight-week time line was established for the

Responsive Parent Program in order to provide parents with a sense of conclusion and to encourage commitment to the program.

A primary function of the group was to provide parents with connections. Parents have since established resources within the community whom they can call after the formal sessions have concluded. At these sessions, parents are also given pertinent literature required by P.L. 94-142. This initial contact, while cursory in nature, is a vehicle to facilitate parent involvement and to provide a means for establishing effective two-way communication. Working in collaboration with school personnel, parents can assist in the identification and assessment of existing or potential learning problems of pre-school children.

The effectiveness indicators, with regard to collaboration with parents, are also met in areas of staff support for parents. Here parents are led to recognize and understand specific changes and improvements in their children--including behavioral, peer, and intra-family relations.

In the area of parent-training, effectiveness indicators provide for specific training related to the implementation of individual programs at home and introduce the availability and use of services of various support agencies throughout the community.

Contact: Woodland School
Southwick, MA.
(413) 569-6598

K-12 PROGRAMS, DISTRICT/STATE WIDE

MODEL 3: NEBRASKA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Nebraska Department of Education received a three-year federal grant to establish a Parent Training Program. The results have been successful. Attention was given at the outset to assure genuine parent participation and involvement rather than merely utilizing a token parent in the planning stages. For example, the Advisory Committee, established the first year, consisted of 66% parents and 34% special and regular classroom teachers and administrators.

In the Nebraska experience, the Advisory Committee redirected the focus of the Parent Training Program from training for parents to training for both parents and educators. This cooperation between the two groups meets one of the criteria of the Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education.

The philosophy that emerged from the Nebraska Advisory Committee embodied the idea that professionals are not always experts. Parents and educators alike agreed that they have something to teach and learn from one another. Thus, from the outset, a blended audience for all training activities was developed. The Advisory Committee strongly felt that for educators to merely give parents an information packet was neither communicative nor informative. The Committee felt it was necessary to establish a team spirit, and this objective was accomplished by several means.

One method was to utilize the annual Nebraska state-wide staff development conference. While both teachers and parents had traditionally been invited to these conferences, most parents did not attend because of the expense. Now, through a combination of Special Education and Chapter 1 funds, parents who attend as a team with an educator receive reimbursement for registration fees. Districts now send blended teams, and both educators and parents report a more accepting and concerned attitude toward special education in their communities.

The topics addressed at the conference in-service programs were those identified as being of mutual interest to parents and educators. In the blended group setting, educators and parents felt truly able to support each other in their quest for relevant solutions. This cooperative spirit is also noticeable at the building level, where a more positive rapport, established from working together as a team, has become a resource for both parents and teachers.

A second means of fostering parent involvement and team spirit was provided through the use of a Parent-Professional Training Team. These teams give two formal presentations in their communities per year. The unique aspect of this program is that parents are the main presenters of the various topics. For example, a parent who is an attorney may present the topic of legal rights. A parent, in cooperation with the State Director, might present the topic of IEP's from both points of view. Professionals are utilized to deal with issues such as anger, communication, or sibling rivalry, but the format is such that

parents always play an active role. By considering both the parents' interests and their ability to provide input on these topics, the training teams became what they were designed to be: groups of parents and educators encouraging and supporting other parents and educators.

This effort meets the Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education criteria because it invites and encourages parents to become part of the planning, development, and evaluation of programs and services. It also serves as a networking vehicle that addresses parent-staff training in specific, identified areas of need.

A third method used for encouraging parental participation is a newsletter. The emphasis is on partnership. The title, "Sharing Connection," reflects this commitment. Philosophically, parents are the consumers of special education services; thus parents' concerns are taken into serious consideration. Some of the topics addressed in the newsletter, such as cultural biases, genetics, and sibling relationships, are meant to both inform and empower the reader through establishing peer group support for families who share similar perceptions and concerns. Often the parents themselves author the articles. The audience consists of a mailing list of 3,000 persons, including grandparents and the extended family of special education students. Students, educators, and other professionals have also written articles. Many articles have been reprinted in national publications such as Exceptional Parent (see References).

Each issue of the newsletter contains a list of resources. Many of these resources have helped in the development of real projects. For example, the Independent Living Movement, initiated through the newsletter, addresses the problems and solutions of barrier removal for the disabled. Through the efforts of this program, Nebraska has adopted a process to reimburse districts for barrier removal, and workshops have been planned in cooperation with school districts throughout the state to inform parents, custodians, and school board members of this project.

Contact: Nebraska State Department of Education
Special Education Division
Mr. Gary Sherman, Director
P.O. Box 94987-4987
Lincoln, NE. 68509-4987
(402) 471-2471

MODEL 4: CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Through a variety of programs funded by the Connecticut State Department of Education (SEA), the Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Personal Services invites parents to become involved in the education of their special education children.

To achieve effective two-way communication with parents, the Connecticut SEA has compiled a comprehensive resource packet for parents of students in special education programs. In compliance with P.L. 94-142, the packet contains information on the federally mandated procedures for disseminating information about services available.

Also included in the packet is information from the National Information Center for Handicapped Children and Youth (NICHCY). The SEA has summarized the legal regulations concerning children who require special education in Connecticut. Included are definitions of nomenclature used in the summary, explanations of the various exceptionalities, timelines for provision of services, the types of services available, and descriptions of programs required by law. It describes in detail parent/student rights and responsibilities, and explains due process procedures. Included is a toll-free 800 number to call when an adult thinks a child might be in need of help from the Special Education Department. This information is provided either in English or in Spanish.

A second booklet in the packet answers the most frequently asked questions about special education in language that is

easily read and understood. Included in this booklet are sample forms for due process, sample letters for school records, and a list of free or low-cost legal services and other relevant services available to the parents of handicapped children.

Although these publications fulfill federal and state compliance requirements, the packet goes beyond merely meeting the minimum legal requirements. Included in the packet is a flyer describing the State Advisory Council, its task, its composition, and its goals and priorities.

The Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center parent packet includes a mail-back flyer describing workshops for parents and educators, other newsletters addressing special education concerns, and places to find more information on local resources. Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education suggest the establishment of such groups to involve parents in the special education process.

Finally, the packet includes a phone number list to which parents can add the numbers of doctors, hospitals, teachers, and a special education complaint hotline. All this information is packaged together in a folder for easy storage and quick reference. Through the mail-back flyers, the hotline numbers, and these publications, the State Department of Education in Connecticut encourages feedback from parents.

The Special Education Resource Center (SERC)is another means used in Connecticut in their attempt to encourage parent involvement. SERC exists to provide materials and training for anyone interested in the education of exceptional children. It

provides support in five areas: 1) library services; 2) personnel development; 3) supportive services; 4) media services; and 5) exhibits and expositions.

While SERC programs are not designed exclusively for parents, many workshops are geared specifically to parents and family members of children with disabilities. This program's services fulfill the Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education's suggestion that there be an on-going training program for parents, even though any one of SERC's services may be used by parents and professionals.

As an example, personnel development is offered as a continuing program of training activities designed to update and expand professional expertise. Also, in supportive services, SERC offers an 800-number to call when a child may need special education assistance. Entitled CHILD FIND, this particular program offers proper evaluation and appropriate educational programs for every child in the state. Information is also provided about programs, activities and services. Through media service, instruction is provided in the manufacture of audio/visual materials, graphics, and printing technologies. The exhibits and expositions branch of SERC offers annual exhibits of instructional materials and full-day topical programs.

SERC publishes a quarterly newsletter funded by P.L. 94-142 monies with a mailing list of 11,000. Through this information and the workshops, parents can receive specific training related to both implementing individual programming and providing appropriate training in the use of various community agencies.

The newsletter and workshops also address one of the effectiveness indicators regarding ongoing parent-training programs.

In addition, Connecticut offers a transition planning project. The main focus of this program includes offering careful preparation assistance to parents as the most effective and helpful way to assist students in the transitional process from the world of school to the world of work. Workshops are offered both during the day and during the evening hours to facilitate parent participation. Parents learn to recognize the key elements of transition and to help their offspring plan for the future. Parents learn to become aware of what services or community help is available to them and how to access these services.

Last year, a Parent/Educator Partnership Program was established. Twenty-two school districts participated in this effort to increase communication between parents and educators and to foster the facilitation of parent groups. In the Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education, it is suggested that there be a systematic approach to enable trained parents to reach out and support other parents. In order to accomplish this, each school district sent professional personnel and one or two parents to training workshops. These groups returned to their individual schools and acted as a liaison team to help other educators and parents bridge the communication gap. Each school building established an effective parent/educator team. This year, thirty-five districts will participate in the same program.

Through all of these activities, the Connecticut Department of Education supports and encourages parents to become advocates of special education programs. Parents are encouraged to actively support their child's learning in partnership with the school staff. This goal corresponds to the second of the Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education, which focuses on the development of methods to accomplish just such a task.

Contact: Dr. Tom Gillung, Bureau Chief
Bureau of Special Education & Pupil Personnel Services
Connecticut Department of Education
25 Industrial Park Road
Middletown, CT. 06457
(203) 638-4265

MODEL 5: SAN DIEGO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The San Diego Unified School District has developed a parent facilitator program to meet the requirements of state and federal legislation, as well as to serve parents of handicapped children from birth through age twenty-one. The Special Education Parent Facilitator Program (SEPF) began in the fall of 1979. Originally funded by a federal incentive grant utilizing P.L. 94-142 funds, it has been funded by the district's Master Plan for Special Education since 1980.

Parents of children with handicaps are employed by the program to provide support and information. Users of their service include parents of children with similar handicaps, the special education teachers, regular education teachers, administrators, the PTA, and interested community agencies. The SEPF model of employing trained parents of handicapped children serves as an efficient, cost-effective way to meet the legal mandate of parent education. The concept also meets the criterion of the effectiveness indicators whereby parents seek to actively support their children's learning in partnership with the school staff. The program provides a cadre of parents who understand both the issues of parenting a handicapped child and the resources and constraints of a school district. Parents learn from other parents how to work with the system for their child's benefit. A cooperative effort is achieved as opposed to an adversarial struggle. Reportedly, requests for fair hearings have dropped markedly since this program's inception in the San Diego schools.

Originally, SEPF hired 15 parents at community aides' wages to work a minimum of 15 hours per week, and funded a project coordinator. The project coordinator was a program specialist who planned and conducted nine hours of in-service training per week for parents. The responsibilities of this initial group were organizational in nature. They included classroom observations, researching services offered by community agencies, making home visits to the parents of children enrolled in their assigned special education classrooms, organizing and conducting informal parent meetings, and coordinating home and school attempts for achievement of IEP goals for each child. Through biweekly planning sessions, in which parent facilitators were organized into small groups according to handicapping condition, they planned relevant activities for parents with children having similar disabilities. In addition, task forces were formed by the parent facilitators to develop parent education materials and programs for various age groups and the Spanish-speaking community. Eventually, a state grant was awarded to develop a curriculum entitled "Connections." A task force was also formed to develop a parent education library.

Today, the parent facilitator is employed by the school district to provide a link between the home and the school. The facilitator's main focus is to provide support and education to other parents of handicapped children. But the training also includes information on legislative procedure, legislation, school district organization, the IEP process, communication skills, normal child growth and development, characteristics of

handicapping conditions, behavior management, family dynamics and the special child, the grief cycle, community resources, and stress management. Regular in-service workshops are also scheduled to insure that facilitators are current in areas pertinent to their role.

The parent facilitator is assigned to one of several school sites as a liaison for establishing a parent education program, making individual home visits and assisting parents with the IEP process. It is the task of the facilitator to develop training for building staff and community members. Through cooperative efforts with community organizations, they sponsor county-wide parent education meetings. Presently, two of the facilitators employed are fluent in Spanish. However, if a family speaks another language in the home, a translator is provided by the school. Interpreters are provided for parents who are deaf. These efforts indicate an attempt to achieve effective two-way communication and collaboration between home and school.

In addition, the facilitator serves on community planning committees and parent organizations. The SEPF program also represents parents on advisory committees with the school district, such as curriculum, staff development, and grading.

Year-end district-wide evaluations are conducted and have consistently shown positive response to the SEPF program. More importantly for this study, results show that parents receiving these individualized services tend to become more involved in their children's education.

The San Diego Unified School District, through the SEPF program, has also developed and collected many parent education materials. One is a handbook covering rights and responsibilities, legislation, the IEP process and program options. There is also the "Connections" curriculum mentioned earlier, and an IEP guide. The program supports an extensive library which makes materials available to parents and staff in the district. The model employed by the San Diego Unified School District embodies all five of the areas outlined in the monograph on effectiveness indicators.

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San Diego, CA. 92103
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MODEL 6: COEUR d'ALENE, IDAHO

The Parent Involvement Project in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, focuses on the parents of secondary level students and involves parents of students classified from LD to severely disabled. The project is in its fourth year of operation and the specific goal is to develop ways in which parents and staff may help students bridge the gap between the school and the working environment.

The program boasts 100% parental participation and the coordinator contributes its success to several factors. The first is that the majority of students have been involved in special education on the elementary or middle school level and parents have already experienced participation with the schools.

A second factor is the program's linkage to the annual review meetings that are held for each special education student. It is during this meeting that programs are established for the following year. At the conclusion of middle school, the first of a series of transitional meetings is conducted. Parents receive information in the form of a manual. Parents who are unable to attend meetings during the day are accommodated at their convenience, which could include meetings at the parents' home or any location that is convenient for the parent. Since the belief is that parents are the foremost advocate for the disabled child, every parent is encouraged and expected to participate. This expectation is communicated to parents through newsletters, telephone calls, visitations, or personal letters, until contact is established. Teachers are considered ambassadors and establish the first line of rapport with the parents. Through a

serious public relations thrust, the coordinator has established visibility within the community for the disabled student.

A third factor contributing to the success of the program is student success itself. In the transition program, students work in a resource employability class. This class operates on a functionally-oriented continuum and each student receives classroom instruction, and in the case of severely disabled students, instruction within a sheltered community work environment. Based on a three-year longitudinal study, 81% of the students are still employed.

Also involved with this parent group is the Mayor's Committee for Hiring the Handicapped. This involves the Private Industry Council, which meets regularly with the coordinator and the editor of the local press. The newspaper runs a weekly column which highlights the positive aspects of local school programs. Students are employed in many production areas of the publication. In addition, individual mentors have been found in business and industry to further meet the needs of the special student as transitions are made from the classroom to the workplace. The coordinator stresses the importance of personal interest in establishing a successful linkage between the parent, the school, and the workplace. The development of relationships with parents based on a mutual respect for their roles in achieving benefits for their children is one of the indicators of effectiveness.

PARENT ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

MODEL 7: PACER CENTER, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

The PACER Center, or Parent Advocacy Coalition for Education Rights Center, is located in Minneapolis. Staffed primarily by persons who are either disabled or parents of disabled children, the Center serves all disabilities--mental, physical, emotional, and learning. The mission of the Center is to help parents become informed and effective advocates for their children, so that parents are better able to effectively participate in the decision-making process within the educational arena. There are programs and services available for parents, children, schools, and other state agencies.

Some of the programs for parents include general information workshops, as well as communication skills, special topic advanced training, and training of trainers workshops. These workshops explain the special education laws, the decision-making rights that parents have in the special education process, and the procedures used by schools so that parents will understand their role when they are contacted by the school.

The Communication Skills Workshops are designed to help parents who are concerned about how they can communicate more comfortably and effectively with the school. The workshops incorporate role-playing as one way to simulate "real life" situations between the home and school.

The Special Topic Workshops are conducted on an "as needed" basis, addressing the specific needs of a particular group.

Workshop offerings have included such topics as sexuality, sibling rivalry, and least restrictive environments.

Advanced workshops are held for parents who have attended basic workshops but want to participate in additional meetings regarding a specific area of interest so that they can improve their ability to either represent their children in the educational arena, or to assist other parents. The Training of Trainer Workshops train parents to become presentors in workshops they wish to design, or to assist other PACER staff members in their presentations to other parents.

There are additional services provided to parents which include bilingual/bicultural materials and resources that explain rights and laws to bilingual parents of children who have special needs. There is also a surrogate parent program for informing and training volunteers who wish to serve as surrogates. There are supported employment programs for parents, and transition programs for parents of disabled secondary school students who will be entering the job market.

Programs for students and schools include a disability awareness program presented via a puppet show for general school audiences. This program is designed to promote an understanding of disabled persons and to decrease the uneasiness felt by children who are having a first encounter with children who are disabled.

Additionally, there is a computer center for helping parents and children become acquainted with computers, with adaptive devices designed for their special needs and appropriate, available software.

Classroom sessions on future planning, self-advocacy, communication skills, and community resources and rights are available for high school students who are mentally disabled, physically disabled, learning disabled, or hearing impaired.

Technical assistance is also offered to other parent training organizations, as well as employment services for disabled persons, state agencies who work with families of young children who have disabilities, and health professionals who assist parents of children with special health care needs. In addition, there are written resources available, such as a newsletter for parents, directories for early childhood services for children with emotional or behavioral disorders, or for children in transition between school and the workplace.

The PACER Center could serve as a model for local school districts, consortiums, or cooperatives who provide special education services for special needs children and who are also interested in the further development of existing local resources. Some of these resources include computer programs, alliances with community-based special needs organizations, the inclusion of active parent organizations in special education issues, and the development of ongoing parent training programs. The criteria of developing ongoing parent programs, as described in the Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education, is addressed by the PACER project. This model directs attention toward the organization and training of parents as advocates, workshop instructors, community/school liaisons, and participants in the decision-making processes concerned with establishing educational opportunities for the disabled.

Contact: PACER Center
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Minneapolis, MN. 55417-1055
(612) 827-2966
1-800-53PACER (MN. residents)

PARENT COMMUNICATION NETWORK

MODEL 8: SOUTH BEND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, INDIANA

South Bend's Parent Communication Network has been functioning since 1982. During the 1981-82 school year, administrators, working with the superintendent, began to establish a parent network within the district for the pupose of:

1) providing a means of genuine communication between the home and school;
2) identifying the real needs and concerns of parents regarding any aspect of their child's education;
3) generating positive public relations and support for South Bend schools; and
4) identifying community resources for both the home and school.

Presently, the network includes local school groups, a school district group and a corporation level group. These groups meet separately as well as collectively, and the agendas are purposely open so that any concerns or questions can be placed before the group.

The Parent Communication Network was initiated at the local school level where a core group of members were established from among the parents, administrators, and teachers of regular and special education students of each school. Meeting dates were publicized in the school community and all interested patrons were encouraged to attend. A minimum of four meetings was scheduled for the school year. Summaries of the meetings were published in the school newspapers.

Following the establishment of groups at the local school level, a second group was organized to represent the district. This group was comprised of one parent representative from each elementary school, two parent representatives from each secondary

school, and the principals of each school. Summaries of district meetings were sent to each core group at the local school level.

A third networking group, consisting of an elementary, middle school, high school and special education parent representative was combined with corporation level administrators. This grouop provided a linkage to the superintendent, and was used for the open discussion of corporation-wide issues. The superintendent acted as chair for the corporation meetings.

Although the network began as a rather structured and hierarchical organization, it provided a forum from which parents, teachers, and administrators could begin to hold a dialogue with one another. Effectiveness Indicators for Special Education suggests that maintaining formal and informal communication among groups within a school community ensures better coordination and greater consistency of goals and instruction at school and at home.

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SUMMARY

These models are examples of some of the local and state efforts now underway across the country in the area of special education that are providing viable ways for parents to become more involved in their children's education. Changes in federal and state regulations regarding disabled persons have given rise to a number of opportunities for greater parental involvement in the education arena. In the Seattle Public Schools, a parent advisory board along with community representatives and professionals has been established to advise the school district on issues relating to special education. On the local level, Woodland School in Massachusetts has established classes in parenting. In addition, parents and teachers are creating a network of resources within the community that will provide support to families with disabled children.

The State Advisory Committee in Nebraska has redirected the focus of their parent training program to include training for both parents and educators. The Connecticut Department of Education is distributing a parent packet throughout the state that explains the federal and state compliance requirements for providing services to its disabled citizens.

In the San Diego Unified School District, a parent facilitator program has been established. The program employs parents of disabled children and provides financial support for educating parents about the issues surrounding disabled persons.

Locally, parents and educators in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, are developing a project that will help disabled students make the transition from the classroom to the workplace.

The PACER Center in Minneapolis is helping disabled citizens and their families to become better informed and more effective advocates for the disabled. Educational programs are being offered through a joint effort of parents and educators, and parents are beginning to participate more effectively in the decision-making process regarding the placement of students in special education programs. In Indiana, the South Bend Community Schools, through the Parent Communication Network, are providing opportunities for parents to enter the decision-making process on issues regarding the education of special education as well as regular education students.

Efforts such as these are pointing the way toward a future where parents will participate in a variety of ways in the education of their children. Parents will enter the education arena as working partners, ready to participate in school decisions and to collaborate with community agencies and schools for the benefit of students.

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HINTS FOR PARENTS OF THE HANDICAPPED*

Here are twenty helpful hints for parents who wish to develop independent living skills for children with disabilities.

1. Set realistic tasks and insist upon completion. A small child can dust chair legs and baseboards and wash windowsills.

2. Teach basic cooking skills. Most children will not have maids and cooks when they grow up. Children with disabilities will still need to know how the process works and the requirements needed to get a job done. They will have to tell their attendants what they want done.

3. Allow children to accept the consequences of behaviors. Excuses are not going to help when they reach a point in adulthood when there is no one to blame or no one to rescue them.

4. Some children will have to grow up in a world that is not made for them. They have to learn to adapt or to be their own advocate.

5. Let children take risks. They will learn, by trial and error, their own style of compensation. Give them the joy of accomplishment, of living with the results of their own decision-making. Help them to cope with the result. Don't penalize them by saying, "I told you so!"

6. Don't set a double standard for other children in the family. Making an exception either way is detrimental to the family unit.

7. Don't let the disabled child think he is the only person in the family. Keep a balance so that the medical treatment, routine, and diet aren't so special that it makes your youngster too different from the rest.

8. Cultivate your child's mind and talents. Make studies, school responsibilities, homework, and projects theirs, not yours. Give them the joy of their own success.

9. Remember that it is hard to be a friend of someone who doesn't have good social skills. Teach appropriate behavior.

10. Stress good habits for the workplace--be on time, complete tasks, and work neatly.

11. Your child needs to be around children who are not visibly disabled. Have your family interact with families who don't have disabled children. Families often are accepting of inappropriate behavior and then find out that other people aren't. Not all peer pressure is negative.

12. Give children ownership of their lives. This will give them the personal management skills necessary for adulthood. People make allowances for children but not for grownups.

13. Don't allow your child to manipulate you. It will be no gift as he/she matures into adulthood.

14. Involve your child in the ordinary activities of running a home, such as: mowing the lawn, taking out the trash, fixing the car, learning to fix a lamp, hanging pictures, doing the laundry. The child may not physically be able to do it, but needs to know how to tell someone else to do it.

15. Teach your child a sense of humor. To keep balance, a perspective on the glitches of life is important.

16. Teach your child how to use leisure time. Build in more skills than sunbathing.

17. Teach children "otherness," to look beyond themselves and their own physical needs. Gifts of thoughtfulness, remembering other peoples' birthdays without being reminded, and gifts of time are appreciated. Build volunteerism into their lives, through activities such as reading to the blind and answering phones for social service agencies.

18. Develop conversational skills. People who can only talk about their own disabilities or keep bringing things back to themselves are boring.

19. Make the medical problems secondary as the child is growing up. Make the disability secondary to helping your child develop into a full, interesting, successful, independent person.

20. If your child needs personal care services, allow another person to care for him, especially as he gets to be a teenager. This will help him as he reaches adulthood. Teach as many personal care skills as you can, as early as you can.

*Source: National Spinal Cord Foundation, ACRES RuraLink Volume 6,3.

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